

CODE

INTERPRETATION



# MECKLENBURG COUNTY Building Code Enforcement

CODE: 2012 NC RESIDENTIAL CODE

SUBJECT: RETAINING WALL GUARDS

REVIEWED: RESIDENTIAL CONSISTENCY TEAM

**Question:**

Are guards required on retaining walls that have more than a 30" drop off to a lower grade level?

**Code reference:**

Section R312.1

**Answer:** Yes, if part of an egress path or along other dedicated walking surface

**DOI interpretation:**

*"The 2012 NC Residential Code, Section R101.2 states; "Accessory structures are not required to meet the provisions of this code except decks, gazebos and retaining walls as required by Section R404.4."*

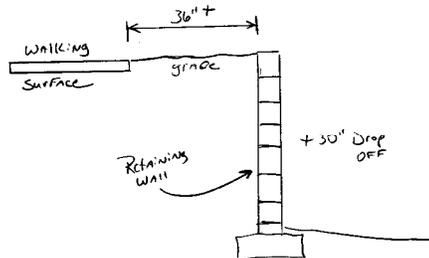
*In accordance with the above, and R404.1.3, it is my opinion that the following residential retaining walls require design and are therefore required to be permitted:*

1. All retaining walls with an unbalanced condition exceeding 48 inches
2. All retaining walls that cross over property lines
3. All retaining walls that support buildings and their accessory structures

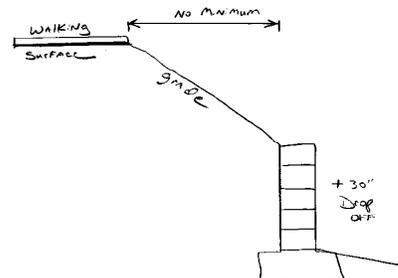
*The NC Residential Code, Section R312.1 states; "Porches, balconies, or raised floor surfaces located more than 30 inches (762 mm) above the floor or grade below shall have guards ..... in height." The NC commentary for this section states: "The guard provisions of this code address the issue of providing protection for occupants from falling off of any elevated walking surface."*

*It is my opinion that guards (complying with R312) must be included on any of the above mentioned retaining walls when the finished area on the high side of the wall is more than 30 inches above the grade below and part of an egress route or other dedicated walking surface".*

**In addition** if the egress route or dedicated walking surface (not grass, but could include-concrete, gravel, pavers, wood walkways, etc...) is within 36" of a retaining wall meeting the requirements as listed above, a guard will be required. To not be considered adjacent to a retaining wall there needs to be at least 36" or greater level grade separation between the retaining wall and walking surface as illustrated below and can be made up of grass area or mulch bed with plantings. A steep grade associated with the walking surface where someone stepping off and cannot regain their balance will require a guard regardless of separation distance.



(No guard required)



(Guard required)

Approved By Jeff Vernon Date 1/5/2016